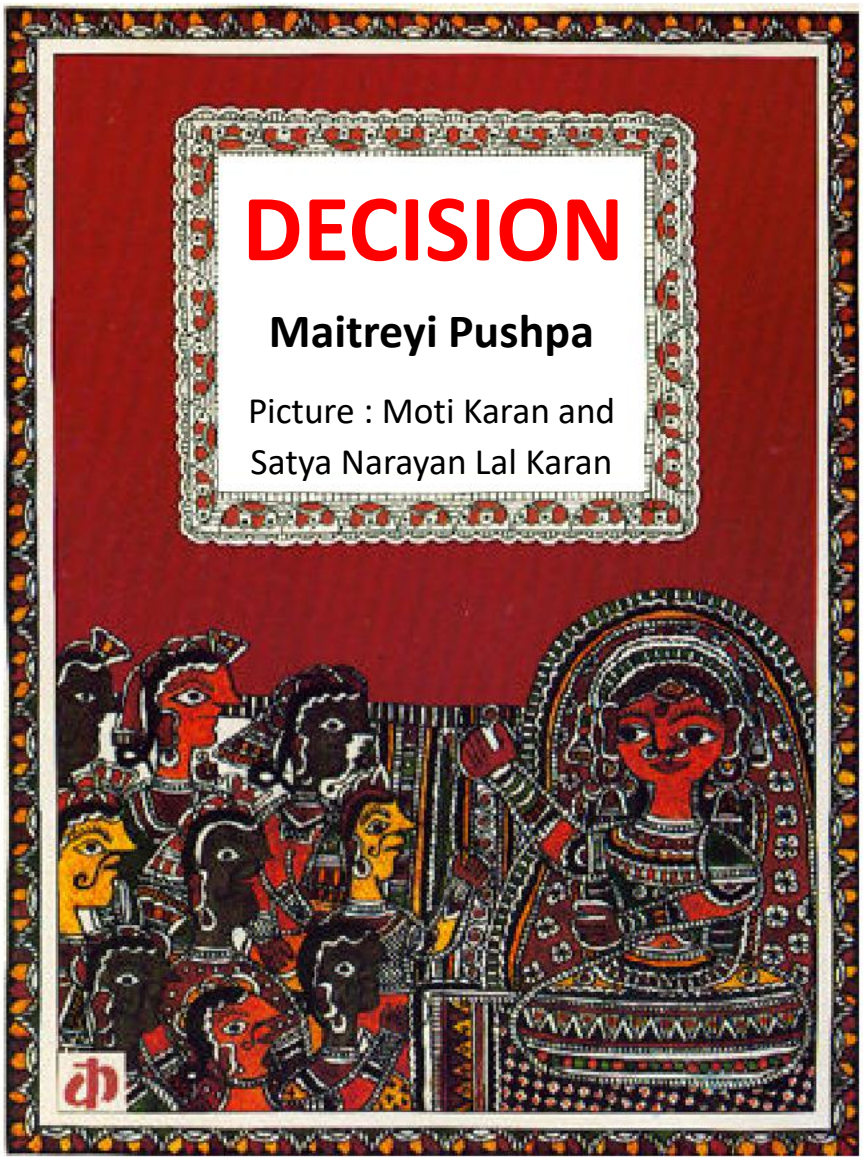
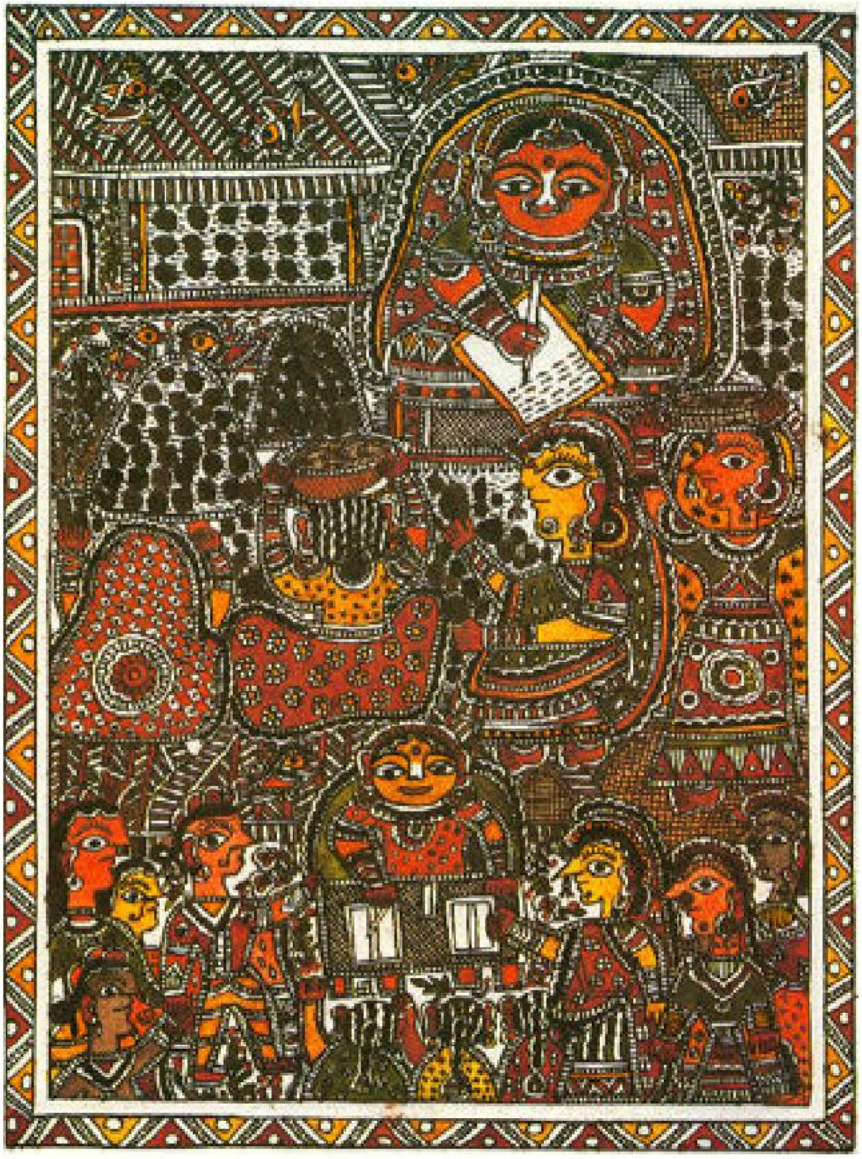

DECISION
Maitreyi Pushpa
Picture : Moti Karan and
Satya Narayan Lal Karan

Maitreyi Pushpa

Maitreyi Pushpa is a renowned Hindi writer and a sensitive poet. She was born in 1944 in a village in the Aligarh district of Uttar Pradesh. In her works, women, despite living in rural settings, remain conscious of their rights. Her novels include "Smritidansh“, "Betwa Bahti Rahi," and "Idannamam" along with her short story collections "Chinar”, "Lalmaniyaan”, and her poetry collection "Lakeerein“. Her works have been translated into Tamil, Kannada, and Urdu, in addition to English. Maitreyi has been honored with the Hindi Academy *Kriti Samman*, the *Premchand Samman*, the *Nanjana Guddu Tirumalamba Shaswati Award*, and the *Katha Award*. Even today, Maitreyi's pen creates rural female characters grappling with harsh societal conventions. "Faisla" is the story of one such woman.



Respected Teacher,

Regards,

You might have heard that the election results have been declared.

Even today I am astonished, just like on the day of my victory.

I never thought that I would be elected for the post of the village Pradhan (Head).

How did I get so many votes?

I understood the reason when I saw the women happy.

I went to the village square to thank the sisters. Anyway, it's not considered appropriate for me to go there. Ranveer had already said that it will not look good if I carried a basket on my head like a labourer. After all, I was the Chief's wife.

When I became the Head, the respect for my husband and our village increased manifold.

I received instructions from many quarters that I should keep a safe distance from the village women. But I would still find myself among them.

I prabably already told you about Isuria.

We both arrived in the village on the same day after getting married. It was not in her nature to be shy.

One day, while herding goats, she came to the village square. “O Basumatia? ...? Our Village Head?”

Everyone started laughing.

She said with a twinkle, “Now that you have become the Head, so now you’re happy, eh? Listen all women, this is the time of equality. Now, if your husband beats you, please report to Basumati. Get your husband sent to jail. Oh Basumati? Like Ranveera, you won't do injustice, will you?"

“When my husband thrashed me, then I myself handed over the papers to Ranveer. Ranveer sat on the papers and did nothing. So, my husband continued bashing me."

Isuriya bared her arms. There were scratches all over. Everyone's faces turned pale.

"Listen, one day Ranveer will grind the millstone and our Basumati will rule," Isuria said walking away.

Early in the morning, after lighting the stove, I had just placed the pan on the fire when I heard a voice.

“Basumati, O Basumatia…” It was Isuria.

“Go, Basumati, the five judges (Panch) are sitting on the platform waiting for you." She beamed with joy.

When I went for the meeting, women started peeping from their houses to see if I was wearing a veil (Ghoonghat) or not.

The edge of my saree reached the forehead. My face was neither veiled nor open.

As soon as we reached the platform, Ranveer came running. He said in a harsh voice, “Where to?”

Isuria replied, “Village Chief, we are going to the Panchayat. Give way."

Ranveer said to me, “You go home.”

Isuria kept gazing with an open mouth.

I felt scorched. All my enthusiasm vanished. Isuria, too, was helpless and so she too returned with me.

Isuria kept muttering, "Look, this is the limit! Basumatiya is the village Head and its Ranveer who is ruling! Instead of acting like the village Chief, Ranveer should take care of his family?"

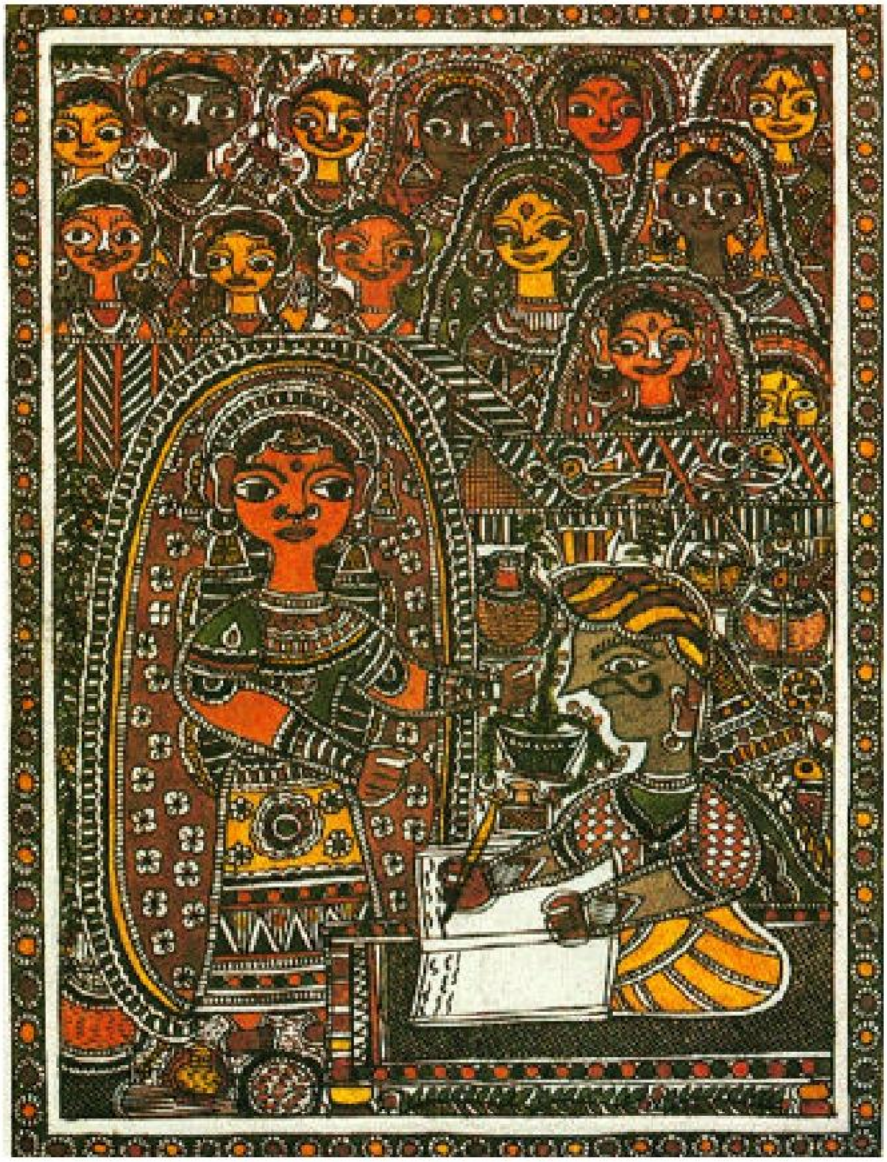
My chest was filled with suffocation.

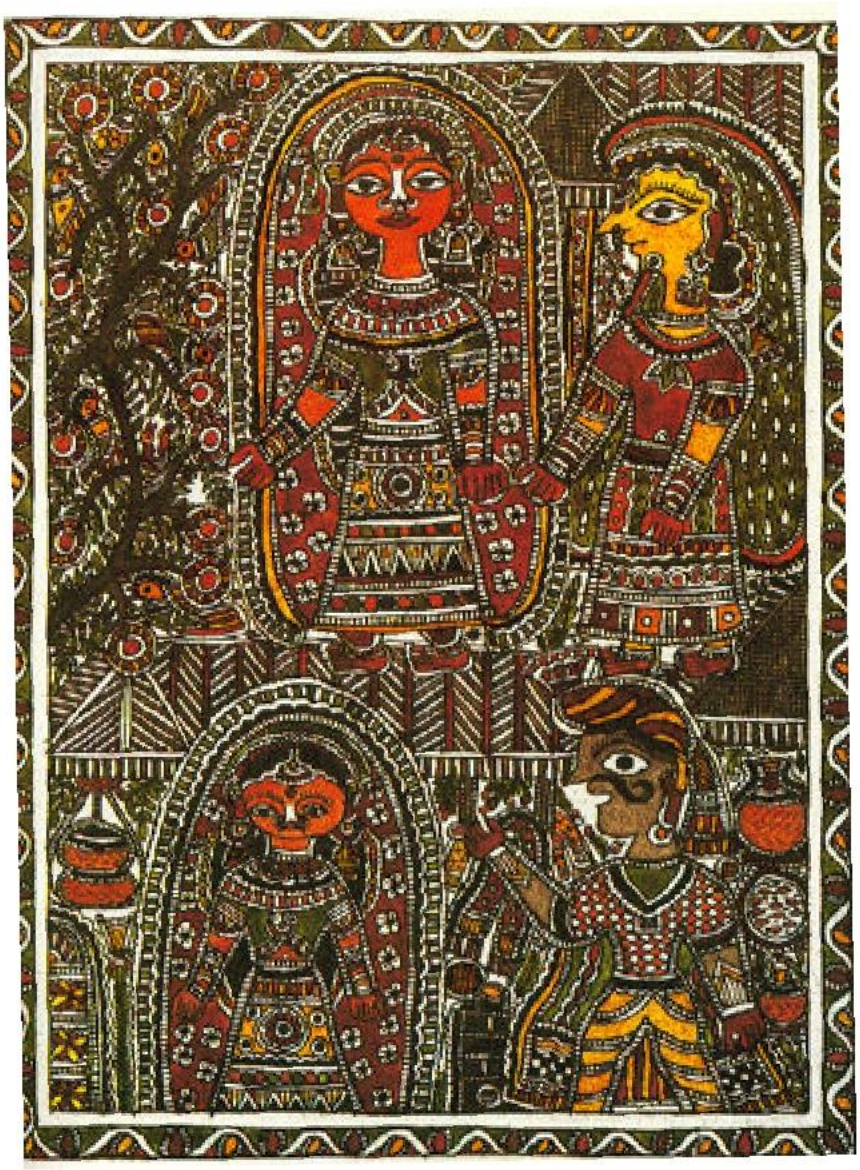
Teacher, thorns kept pricking my soul.

Ranveer returned and tried to explain.

"You would’nt have looked good sitting on the Panchayat platform. Please don't lose your modesty."

After that day, I kept receiving invitations from the Panchayat platform. But as soon as I would cross the threshold, someone would scold me.
I don't know why, but I lacked the courage to confront and respond. My heart would simmer. Irritation would rise to my lips. But like milk foam, my inner protest would soon subside.





Sir, I thought for days and decided not to sign. Let Ranveer do as he pleased. Ranveer was sitting on the cot, holding the register. He called me out several times. Finally, when he grew irritated, I went near and stood beside him.

"Ranveer?"

He stared with his mouth open.

"The laborers had come to me, their mortar, stones, transportation wages, have not been paid till now...? The women of the village taunt me, saying that the village Head has got a concrete wall constructed at her door. You paved your own street with stones, but what enmity did you have with us, sisters, that you left us in the mud."

"Who would say that this was the Chief’s village? Water in the pits, mosquitoes, garbage, nothing happened with the money which came from Jawahar Rozgar Yojana...," I continued saying.

"Was the village women saying that, or was it you? When did these women start talking to me in this tone? No one ever asked me anything, but they keep asking you so many questions." Ranveer's language was sharp.

With trembling hands, I wrote it silently.

‘Basumati Devi’

Signature!

The day I got this money, I dreamt of shining schools, paved streets, employment and many other development projects for the village.

My signature shattered every brick of that dream house.

A few days later, an old woman came and knocked on the door.

"Oh child?? Basumati?"

I came to the courtyard. The old lady fell at my feet, "Daughter, please understand my helplessness and plight. My son-in-law in not allowed leave. Please expedite the verdict of my daughter Hardei."

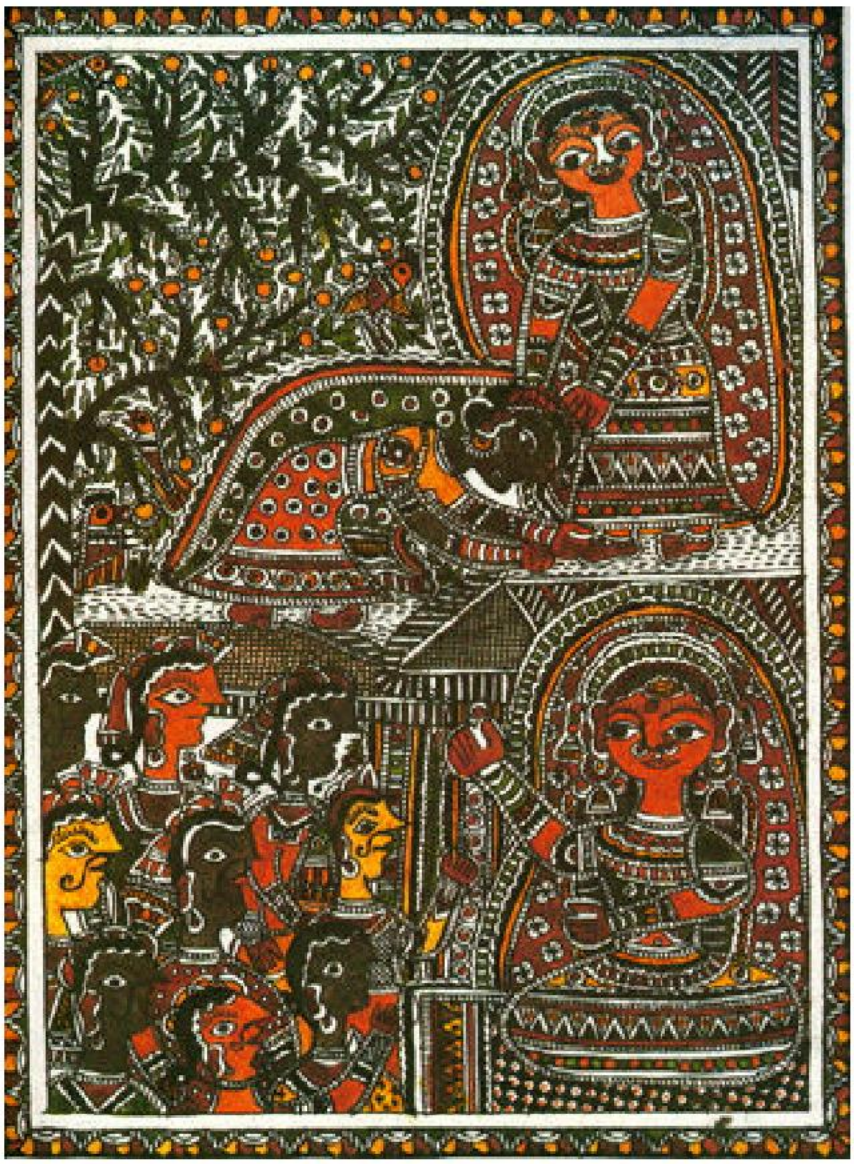
I stood there and listened.

"Daughter, the pain of a girl is invisible. The father is a devil, living peacefully is not in our fate." Saying this tears started flowing from her eyes.

At that moment, I don't know why, but I walked with the old lady, with hesitant steps. All the while my brother-in-law Devveer tried to stop me.

I returned with the verdict. I felt an immense sense of satisfaction. The Panchayat platform felt like a temple.

That night, Ranveer’s curses and abuses bathed me from head to toe.



"If you were interested in such court work, then you should have studied law. Tell me when will you stop this drama."

I shivered with fear. Yet, somehow, words fell from my lips.

"Hardei was pleading. I wish you had decided her case. You knew everything. So, why didn't you free her from her father's clutches?"

He started trembling with anger.

"What decision? The verdict which you just got?"

"Listen, I had no choice, but to make you stand for the elections. It was a compulsion as I couldn't hold two posts. Then I thought, who would be more trustworthy than my wife?"

There was a venomous smile on Ranveer’s face as he said the words 'trustworthy’. It singed through my heart like a torrent. I felt like leaving everything behind and going somewhere else.

I wish I were Isuria. Free from the false notions of honor and decorum. Beyond these hollow traditions.

When I woke up in the morning, I felt scared.

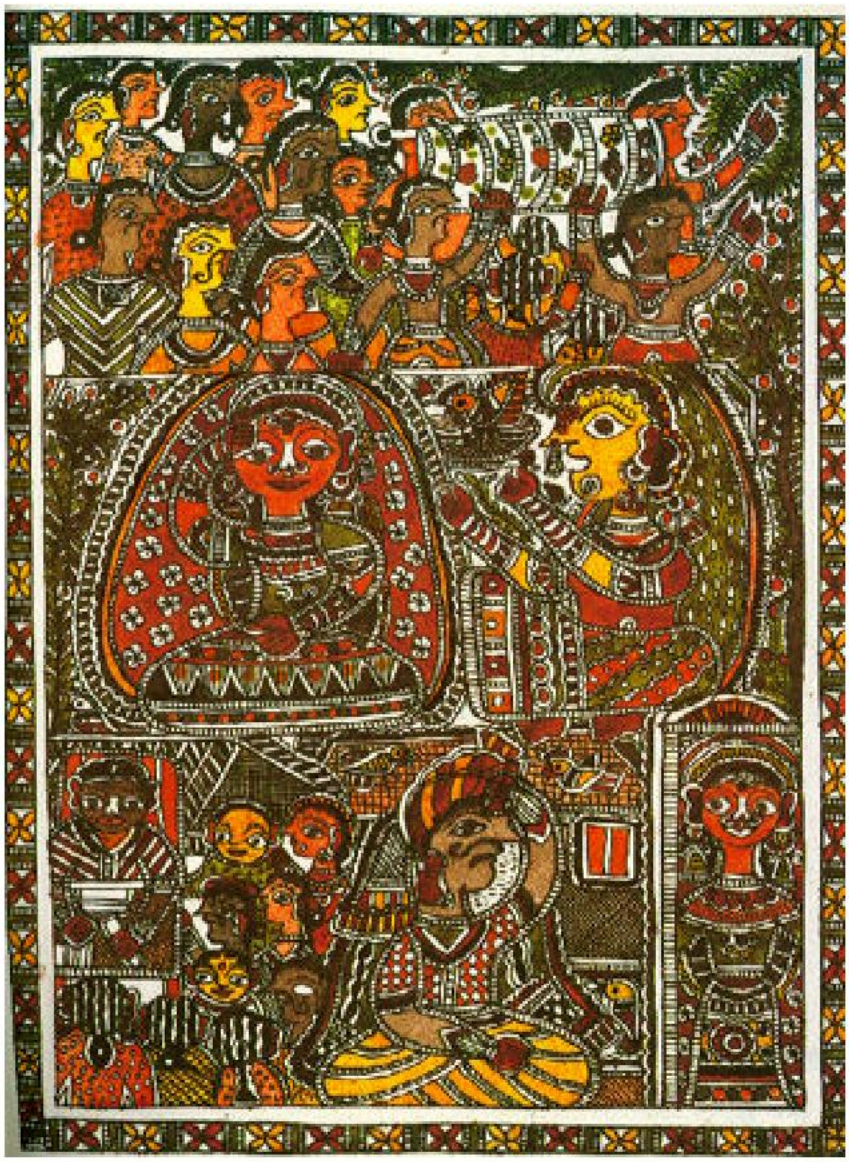
"Your education is useless! All your studies are worthless!" It was Isuria's struggling voice.

Hardei committed suicide by jumping into a well.

I felt exhausted and sat still in the courtyard. Who changed the judge’s verdict overnight? Who stopped Hardei from leaving with her husband?

Isuria kept shaking me, and saying, "It would have been better if we had cast our vote for a wooden stick – for some lifeless, piece of wood. At least it would have stood-up and attacked the enemy. But Ranveer's bride, you are the daughter-in-law of this big house. You are also the village Chief’s wife."

It felt as if Hardei's funeral procession started from my own house.



Time passed. It was time to re-elect the village Chief. Ranveer filed his nomination for the village Chief’s post. The prevailing political wind ensured that three candidates withdrew their nominations just before the voting day. One candidate still remained in the fray – and he was blacksmith. Perhaps he was young, and naive.

Ranveer returned very tired in the evening.

He lost. There was not much to understand. I tried consoling him over his defeat. I tried everything I could to comfort my husband, both physically and mentally.

Just then, I heard Devveer call from outside. "If there had been just one more vote, then brother wouldn't have lost."

One single vote!

I couldn't believe my ears. Everything inside me went into a deep turmoil. It happened. But what could I do?

That day, I could not kill the Isuriya within me.

Sorry,

Yours

Basumati